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## THE JEWISH APOCALYPSES

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Among the longer New Testament books, the Revelation of John is probably for most of us of least importance. We know the first three chapters, we admire the description of the heavenly Jerusalem at the end, we love a few passages from the body of the book, but for the rest we hardly care. As a rule it is neither expounded in the pulpit nor explained in the Sunday schools.

Nor is this the result of a modern development. Even the reformers did not attach great value to this book. Luther said of it: "Let everybody think of it what his spirit tells him; my spirit cannot accommodate itself to it." Zwingli referred to it as not a biblical book, and Calvin who gave an excellent exposition of the whole New Testament, omitted the second and third epistle and the Revelation of John. In the oldest editions of Luther's translation of the Bible the Revelation as well as the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the epistles of James and Jude, are treated as an appendix to the New Testament, neither the books themselves nor their pages being counted. Even some of his contemporary Roman Catholic theologians, as Erasmus and Cajetan, the papal legate at Augsburg, considered Revelation as an apocryphal book. Therein they only followed Jerome, who in the East had heard that a great many Greek theologians rejected it. Already in the second century it was objected to, though only by a small party.

On the other hand there were at all times some people who studied the book most diligently and who held it in the highest esteem. They found in it a prediction of their own time, and though of course every generation was corrected by the following one, everyone believed himself able to correct the preceding ones. From Tolstoi's famous novel, *War and Peace*, it is well known that at the beginning of the last century in Russia the Beast of Revelation was understood to be Napoleon, as was also Germany by the French at the time of the Franco-German war, and England by the Boers during the South

African war. Even now in America as well as in Europe many people explain the Revelation in this way and announce on the basis of it the end of the world in the near future.

What then is the real meaning of this strange book which has been and still is studied so diligently and yet is interpreted so erroneously?

To answer this question we must compare the Revelation of John with the Jewish apocalypses that came into existence in the centuries immediately before and after Christ. It is only in this way that we can find out not only what the book means but also how a great many passages in the other New Testament writings are to be explained. The peculiarities of this whole literature will best be discovered if we study one after another the different books which comprise it. We have not the time, however, to consider all the writings of this period that contain apocalyptic material (the Sibylline Oracles, the Book of Jubilees, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Psalms of Solomon), but must confine ourselves to the books which must be characterized as apocalypses, though even they contain some statements which at first sight do not seem to lend themselves to such an interpretation.

The oldest of these writings is the Book of Daniel, written between 168 and 165 B. C. It divides itself into two parts, each of which embraces six chapters. The first six chapters aim to confirm belief in God's protection of his people, but the second part of the book is of chief interest for us. It contains prophecies of the future in the form of visions. The prophets sometimes had visions, but with the apocalypists this is the usual form of foreseeing the future. Perhaps sometimes the writer created the form, but the material of these visions was in part at least derived from tradition.

This is most clearly to be seen in the very first vision in the second part of the Book of Daniel in chap. 7. Here Daniel is reported to have seen four beasts coming up from the sea and having all together seven heads and ten horns. The sea and some other particulars are not interpreted later on; so they must have been derived from tradition. But originally the whole expectation must have had a simpler form. The description of the four beasts and of the beasts with seven heads and ten horns in the Revelation of John, as we shall see, were originally identical; nay, this expectation of one beast must

have been older than that of four, as we meet it in the Book of Daniel. For why should just the third beast have had four heads and just the fourth ten horns? This can be explained only if the original of these four beasts was one beast with seven heads and ten horns, as it is described in the Revelation of John. And from it we learn at the same time what this beast originally signified. In 17:8 we read: "The beast that thou sawest was and is not, and is about to come out of the abyss, to go into perdition." The reference is not to the reappearance of Nero to whom it is referred later on; rather, it means that the beast that is to appear before the end had formerly appeared. Indeed we read of a monster that was defeated by God in olden times in several places of the Old Testament. Two of the clearest passages are Isa. 51:9, where God is asked: "Is it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces, that didst pierce the monster?" and Ps. 74:13 f., where it is said of him: "Thou breakest the heads of the sea-monsters in the waters, thou breakest the heads of leviathan in pieces."

Now it is clear that such a conception could not originate in Israel; it is therefore quite comprehensible that a great many scholars have tried to trace it back to another religion. But Tiamat, whom in the Babylonian epic of the creation Marduk is said to have conquered, is described as a woman, not as a beast. Still we have a great many plastic representations of the fight of a Babylonian god with a monster, by which the monster of hoary antiquity may be understood. A similar tradition is found in Parseeism; nay here the snake Azi Dahaka, as that monster is called with the Parsees, is not only going to reappear before the end, but is identified with worldly powers, just as the beasts in Daniel and in the Revelation of John. There can be no doubt that this expectation in Judaism and Christianity is traceable to other religions; and perhaps this also holds good with regard to other peculiarities of the Jewish Christian eschatology.

But before we answer this question we must discuss the verses immediately following the description of the four beasts: "I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was ancient of days did sit: his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool: his throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him; thousands of thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times

ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened"—the books in which all deeds of men, or the names of those who are destined for eternal life or eternal death, are recorded. "I beheld even till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed, and it was given to be burned with fire. And as for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away." Since God—for he is of course the Ancient of Days—was mentioned in the beginning of the passage, it would have been more natural to describe all this in the active form, if he really was to perform it; so from the fact that the passive form is used, we must conclude that God is not to emerge from his majestic absenteeism. How different this conception then is from that which had been in vogue! Even such a late writer as the author of the sixty-third chapter of Isaiah does not hesitate to say: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winevat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the peoples there was no man with me; yea, I trod them in mine anger, and trampled them in my wrath; and their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my raiment." Such a conception was utterly unacceptable to later generations; so instead of this extermination of his enemies by God, a great assize was expected, and even at that God was not to do anything. We shall presently see how the Messiah was involved in this transcendent view of God, and how this whole process ultimately influenced also the Christian eschatology.

There is one point in the description of this assize that demands a more detailed survey. God's throne is fiery flames and a fiery stream issues from before him by which the beast is burned. This is not found in the earlier Old Testament conception, but only in Judaism and Christianity on the one hand and Parseism on the other, so this expectation of a destruction of the world by fire must have been borrowed from the same source.

And now we come to the most important verses in the whole chapter. "Behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they

brought him near before him, and there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." This one like unto a son of man is later on interpreted as symbolic of the people of the saints of the Most High; but this could not have been the original meaning of the term. For (1) inasmuch as the beasts have been derived from tradition we must expect the same to hold good for the son of man. (2) His coming with the clouds of heaven is not explained though it is not clear in itself, and on the contrary, it does not at all apply to the people of Israel. (3) Later writers, as we shall see, understood by the son of man the Messiah, in a special sense of the word; however, they could hardly have misinterpreted Daniel in such a way, but must therein have followed an independent tradition, from which at the same time they could derive the additions found with them, but not in Daniel. In other words, there must have existed a tradition, according to which a man who had pre-existed in heaven would appear on earth.

Now such a tradition could hardly have been born in Israel; it must have been borrowed from another religion. Indeed, we know that the Persians, later on at least, venerated the first man as God; so it was probably for this reason that the Jews called the Messiah in so far as he was to sit in judgment, son of man. How this whole expectation originated we shall see presently.

One point in this picture of the future has not yet been explained; the last king of the kingdoms preceding that of Israel shall have power to change the times and the law a time and times and half a time. A similar statement is made in the last chapter of Daniel and in the Revelation of John: the dominion of the last enemy shall last 42 months, or 1,290 or 1,335 days. Thus this number must have been traditional too; but how it originated we cannot yet tell.

On the other chapters of Daniel we need to touch but lightly. The two beasts that appear in chap. 8 are perhaps only a differentiation of the one beast that is to appear before the end—just as the two beasts in Rev., chap. 13. The prayer of repentance in chap. 9 is characteristic of the whole mood of this period, which also furnishes the explanation of the frame of mind of those laboring and heavy

laden whom Jesus called, and of the consciousness of guilt as we find it in Paul. Finally chap. 11 shows more clearly than any of the preceding ones that the book was really written as the date given above, for it describes the events immediately preceding it much more accurately than the former ones and predicts the future in a way which did not harmonize with the facts. The author put all this into the form of a prophecy and attributed it to a well-known man of the past to promote belief in his predictions. For a similar reason all the other Jewish apocalypses, to which we must turn now, are also pseudonymous.

The oldest of them is the Book of Enoch, originally written in the Hebrew or Aramaic, preserved in an Ethiopic and incompletely in a Greek and Latin translation. It is probably even older than most scholars, following Schürer, at present believe, nothing pointing to a later date than 64 B.C. Nor can it be proved that chaps. 1-36, 72-105, ever enjoyed a separate existence. The whole book consists of different traditions which perhaps had been committed to writing before they were incorporated into the present book; but nobody can tell whether some of them, and which, were connected with each other before that time.

The book begins with a general description of the coming judgment in chaps. 1-5. Here we read the passage quoted from it by the epistle of Jude. Then follows a twofold report on the fall of the angels who also are to be punished ultimately at the end of all things; they are represented as having married mortal women. It is well known that the same myth is found in Gen., chap. 6; but it is also presupposed, when Paul writes to the Corinthians that their women ought to have an "authority on their head, because of the angels," who otherwise could be enticed by their beauty. Then follows a description of Enoch's journeys, which was inserted here because in it things and persons connected with the final judgment were mentioned. Most interesting for the New Testament scholar is chap. 20, where, according to the Greek text at least, seven angels are mentioned, the origin of which, however, can be discussed only later, and chap. 22, where Hades is no longer the same for all men, as in the Old Testament, but has undergone a fourfold division. In one of them, which is for the souls of the righteous, there is a spring of water just as in

the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, in Luke, chap. 16. In another division Enoch notices a spirit whose complaining voice penetrates to heaven and he is told by the angel Raphael who guides him: "This is the spirit which went forth from Abel, whom his brother Cain slew, and he keeps complaining of him till his seed is destroyed from the face of the earth"—which may serve as an explanation of Heb. 11:9, where Abel is described as yet speaking though being dead.

But the similitudes in chap. 37-71 form the most interesting part of the book. For here the Messiah, or, as he is called here, the Son of Man, who was chosen and bidden by God before the creation of the world and for evermore, is represented as sitting in judgment, in the place of God who seemed to be too transcendent even for that. There can be no doubt that such an expectation had to do with Jesus' belief in his second coming.

Apparently only after this last judgment a last attack of a hostile power is expected. In general this belief was as old as Ezekiel, and perhaps even older; here the hostile power is identified with the Parthians and Medes, who threatened Palestine during the two previous centuries, and in the same form, as we shall see, the expectation is preserved even in the Revelation of John.

The astronomical book, as we are wont to call it, or the book of the courses of the luminaries of the heaven and the relations of each, as the author himself terms it, is inserted here because all this shall become chaos ere the end. Then follow two visions of Enoch, the one referring to the flood, which is here as so often in Judaism and early Christianity regarded as "prototype of the last judgment," the other referring to the history of the people from Adam forth. Of course properly speaking, Enoch did not need to see in a vision what had happened before his time; hence here the author has either made use of a vision ascribed to Adam or more probably—for not even Adam needed to see in a vision how he and his wife would be born—he has forgotten his part. All these chapters are of little weight for our purpose; so I only emphasize the fact that Enoch is said to have had these two visions before he took a wife. That is, virginity is considered as the higher form of morality, just as not only by the author of the Revelation of John, but also by Paul.



More important for us is the apocalypse of the ten weeks which is incorporated into the book of woes and consolations, contained in chap. 93 and 91:12-17, for originally these verses must have followed chap. 93. Here two judgments are distinguished. In the eighth week the righteous are to reign, in the ninth "all the words of the godless are to vanish from the whole earth, and the world is to be consigned to destruction, and all mankind shall seek the path of righteousness, and after this, in the tenth week the great eternal judgment shall occur in which He will execute vengeance amongst the angels." So the older expectation of an earthly kingdom and the more modern of a new heaven and a new earth are put side by side, just as in some other Jewish apocalypses, of which we shall hear presently, in the Revelation of John and in I Cor. 15:23 ff.

But before we turn to these later Jewish apocalypses we must speak of another which was written about the beginning of our era, the Assumption of Moses. Only a part of it survives and that in a Latin translation made from the Greek. Whether the book was originally written in the Hebrew or Aramaic we cannot tell, and certainly its author was no zealot, as Schürer believes, since a zealot would hardly have passed by in silence the rising of the Maccabees, but a pietist and rigorist who expected salvation from God's interference and strongly disapproved the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. "Though their hands and their minds touch unclean things," says he, "yet their mouth will speak great things; they will say furthermore do not touch me lest thou shouldst pollute me." So we find here a remarkable illustration of Christ's criticism of the Pharisees; but as for the rest this book is of comparatively little interest.

Much more important are the two last apocalypses, which must be considered here, the apocalypses of Baruch and of Ezra. The former is probably the older one, indeed written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. and probably in Hebrew; it is extant only in a Syriac version. The book is a unity, though like most of the other apocalypses it employed different traditions. I can mention here only the most important of them.

In chap. 2 of Baruch, Jeremiah and all those who are like them are commanded to leave Jerusalem, for their works are to this city as a firm pillar and their prayers as a strong wall; i. e., it cannot be

destroyed as long as these righteous men are in it. Thus here the theory is presupposed that good deeds may be put to other person's account, a theory which in part brought about Paul's interpretation of Christ's death. His philosophy of the origin of sin as due to the fall of Adam, on the other hand, has in part at least its parallel in the apocalypses of Baruch and Ezra since these writings also derive the universality of death from the fall of the first man. Moreover both of them contain very complete descriptions of the calamities which according to Jewish and Christian expectation are to precede the end. The apocalypse of Baruch discriminated between twelve periods of these tribulations: "in the first period there will be the beginning of commotions. And in the second there will be slayings of the great ones. And in the third there will be the fall of many by death. And in the fourth the sending of desolation. And in the fifth famine and the withholding of rain. And in the sixth earthquakes and terrors. . . . And in the eighth a multitude of portents and incursions of the Shedim. And in the ninth the fall of fire. And in the tenth rapine and much oppression. And in the eleventh wickedness and unchastity. And in the twelfth period confusion from the mingling together of all those things aforesaid." In chap. 40 we hear of a last leader of the enemies that is to appear before the end; that is in general the same person as the man of sin in II Thess. and the Antichrist in the Johannine epistles. Moreover there is in chaps. 50 f. a theory relative to the bodies of those raised from the dead somewhat similar to that brought forward by Paul in I Cor., chap. 15: "The earth will then restore the dead, which it now receives in order to preserve them, making no change in their form, but as it has received, so will it restore them. For then it will be necessary to show to the living that the dead have come to life again and that those that had departed have returned again. And it will come to pass, when they have severally recognized those whom they now know, then judgment will grow strong, and those things which before were spoken of will come. And it will come to pass, when that appointed day has gone by, that then shall the aspect of those who are condemned be afterwards changed, and the glory of those who are justified." Finally in chap. 54 as well as in some passages of the apocalypse of Ezra, not only works, but also faith is spoken of as justifying. It was in opposition to this Jewish conception

that Paul formulated the principle: we reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

The apocalypse of Ezra, usually known in America as the second book of Ezra, has been read in the Christian church more than any other Jewish apocalypse, excepting of course the book of Daniel. We have a Latin, Syriac, Ethiopic, Armenian, and two Arabic translations of it; it was even appended to the Vulgate and to some German and English versions of the Bible. Luther, it is true, would have liked to cast it into the Elbe, but as a matter of fact it is the most thrilling picture of Jewish thought at the time of Christ and Paul which has survived. The book, says Professor F. C. Porter, "records an inward struggle, as real as that of the writer of Job, in which an earnest religious thinker seeks to maintain his faith in monotheism and in salvation through the law over against opposing facts; against the ill fortune of Israel in the loss of its temple and nationality, against the power of evil in this world in general, and against the inability of the law to produce righteousness in man because of his evil heart." In the first vision Ezra received an answer similar to that of Job: "They that dwell upon the earth can understand nothing, but what is upon the earth;"—and as of course he is not satisfied with it, he is consoled. "If thou shalt remain, thou wilt see, and if thou shalt live long, thou wilt wonder; for the world hasteth fast to pass away." In the second vision he is at first asked: "Lovest thou Israel better than he that made it?" but only the same insufficient solutions of the problem are repeated. Finally in the third vision Ezra is told that it is their own fault if men perish, but that of course fails to help him. Nor is it worth much that the punishment does not begin immediately after death, that there is an intermediate state, as it is assumed in the New Testament too; the idea, that on the day of judgment the righteous shall apologize for the godless or pray in their behalf to the Most High, is rejected. Once more God's love is appealed to, but the angel, who speaks with Ezra, answers: "The Most High hath made this world for many, but the world to come for few." Once more he is assured: "Thou comest far short that thou shouldest be able to love my creature more than I—but this love is meant only for a few." So the problem remains unsolved; it could be solved only by the belief in God's love as Christ preached it.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth visions resemble those in the second part of the Book of Daniel, in Enoch 85 ff., and one in the apocalypse of Baruch which I have not yet mentioned. In the fourth, Ezra sees how a woman, who mourned for the loss of her only son, is suddenly glorified, and how in her place a great city appears. The angel explains that the woman is Zion and her son the temple and that the city now before his eyes is the glorious Jerusalem which shall eternally endure. Probably this idea would not have been expressed in such a way if the story had not been transmitted to the author.

The fifth vision describes Rome and its fall under the figure of an eagle threatened by a lion. Perhaps here too an older tradition was made use of; from its present form it is to be concluded that the whole book was written in or a little after 96 A. D.

The sixth vision is parallel in so far as it also pictures the last judgment, but it does this in another, more universalistic way: not only Rome but all the nations shall be judged; and the Messiah, or, as he is called here again, the Son of Man, is described in the vision itself otherwise than in its interpretation. In the vision itself we read: "He neither lifted up his hand, nor held a sword, nor any weapon of war; but I saw only how he sent out of his mouth as it had been a blast of fire, and out of his lips a flaming breath, and from his tongue he sent forth sparks and tempests." Certainly this originally had another sense than that which is found in it by the author who represents God—these two visions are explained by God himself—as saying: "This my Son shall punish those nations, which have come, for their godlessness, that is like the tempest; and shall bring before them their evil thoughts, and the torments wherewith they shall begin to be tormented, which are like the flame; and shall destroy them without labor by the law, which is like the fire." But it is remarkable that here, as in the preceding vision, the Messiah is represented as judge; for we learn thereby again how wide-spread this conception must have been at Christ's time.

In consequence of the last vision Ezra restores the ninety-four books which had been burned at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians—a tradition held by a great many other writers. Twenty-four books shall be published—these are the canonical books of the Old Testament; the seventy others shall be delivered

only to them that are wise among the people—these are the apocalypses. They were then more highly esteemed, by some Jews at least, than even the canonical books of the Old Testament; but later on they were rejected by them, so that they were preserved to us only by the Christian church.

And how should the modern world estimate them, apart from their importance for the explanation of the New Testament and especially the Revelation of John? This is not the place to speak of the value of this whole apocalyptic literature in general; but even here we pause to say that the Jewish apocalypses are inestimable sources for our knowledge of the religious development of the Jewish nation. The picture of Judaism would be very one-sided, nay, the finest and most admirable colors in it would be wanting, if we did not possess these books.